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The carnal mysticism of D.H. Lawrence, at least his fictive portrayal of it in *Sons and Lovers* (*S&L*) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (*LCL*), defies conventional definition. His is a world where love is an essential characteristic of a full life; yet an enterprise which is lethal to those uninitiated in its subtlest facets. Like a loaded gun in the hands of a child, "love," in Lawrence's fiction, is likely to cause more harm than good. The "child," in this case, is the twentieth-century man taking his first tentative steps in the modern world. For Lawrence, in this modern world, the sexual act is beneficial, not in terms of coupling or union, but in terms of the mutual excitation and "near completion" of two isolated entities. And this isolation is not a crisis to be done away with. No, isolation must be preserved; it might (and should) be assuaged by love and through sex; but it must be preserved. To eliminate the essential isolation of man is to eliminate the individual identity. The elimination of the individual identity in the fiction of D.H. Lawrence spells oblivion. By novel's end, the best-intentioned lover who is not privy to the peculiar moral nuances and sexual parameters of Lawrence's world view, is bound to become a murderer, a suicide, or both.

I say the carnal mysticism which most characterizes Lawrence's *modern* world view defies conventional definition because it doesn't involve a direct inversion of previously held beliefs. He doesn't simply turn the convention of love on its head, but rather skews love's potential for good or bad. In this regard, too much of a good thing is deadly. Lawrence writes:

> Love is the mysterious vital attraction which draws things together, closer, closer together. For this reason, sex is the actual crisis of love. For in sex the two blood systems, in the male and the female, concentrate and come into contact, the merest film intervening. Yet if the intervening film breaks down, it is death.
>
> So there you are. There is a limit to everything. There is a limit to love.
>
> The central law of all organic life is that each organism is intrinsically isolate and single in itself.

> The moment its isolation breaks down, and there comes an actual mixing and confusion, death sets in . . . Each individual organism is vivified by intimate contact with fellow organisms: up to a certain point.
>
> (*Studies In Classic American Literature*, 71)

These limitations complicate the moral and metaphysical fabric of his fiction even as they complicated the man himself. It is true that Lawrence, hailed by many as the apostle of the coital act, also refused to shake hands with most people, invoking his pet mantra, *Noli mi tangere,* "don't touch me." On one hand, sex is the ineluctable attraction most characteristic of life; on the other, it is a crisis that puts the lover at the ultimate risk, namely the loss of isolation which is the breakdown of identity which will finally manifest itself as death. "There is a limit to everything" says Lawrence. Is the limit the same for everyone? The stakes are high, and in fairness to Lawrence, in his *Studies in Classic American Literature* he delineates (exhaustively) the nature and parameters of these qualitative limits.

Lawrence's characters must negotiate his fictional landscape like a mine field. They must follow their instinctive attractions and yet avoid the "isolation breakdown" which can only end in death. It's a wonder they move at all. But move they do. *In Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Oliver Mellors emerges from the novel intact and hopeful while, in *Son's and Lovers*, Paul Morel is last seen more dead than alive.

The Natural Man vs The Artificial Man

> *"Come on lass," he said to the dog. "We're best outside."* (*LCL*, 126)

In both of these novels, the old ways (characterized by man's organic interaction with nature) have long given way to the modern ways (characterized by man's subjugation of nature.) The mining industry, which Lawrence paints as a monolithic plunderer the earth, provides a telling background to the plot in each work. Oliver Mellors is a game keeper, though. He looks after the living things on the Chatterley estate, and as such, maintains the natural order as his vocation. Connie's first glimpse of Mellors is that of the man in his natural habitat, engaged in his daily ablutions and naked to the waist.

> Perfect, white, solitary nudity of a creature that lives alone, and inwardly alone. And beyond that, a certain beauty of a pure creature. Not the stuff of beauty, not even the body of beauty, but a lambency, the warm, white flame of a single life, revealing the contours that one might touch: a body! (57-8)

The passage is replete with those qualities which make Mellors an anachronistic, yet vital, man in the modern world. The keeper is solitary, nude, sensual. He is a primal man; closer to Eden than the mine pit or the factory. Mellors is a "pure crea-

ture," alive and interactive in nature, and therefore, beautiful to Connie whose paraplegic husband is effectively half alive and engaged in the heady matters of ambition and modern success. Mellors will prove to be a character capable of a love that's not deadly. *Nota bene*, Lawrence makes an important distinction in this passage between "the stuff of beauty" and the tactile lambency betrayed by the contours of Mellor's body.

Later in this novel, we see Duncan Forbes proffered as not only the manque father of Connie's expected child, but as an effete purveyor of "the stuff of beauty." That is, Forbes is an example of what Lawrence sees as another aberration of the modern world: the artist. The industrialist and the artist are two sides of a pernicious coin in the losing proposition which is Lawrence's modern world. They both render and manipulate the natural rhythms of the earth in a willed state of disconnection.

In *LCL*, Mellors, the game keeper, maintains and monitors these natural rhythms and remains connected to the earth. In *S&L*, Paul Morel, the visual artist, paints protoplasmic extrapolations of clouds. He fits nature to his impressions of it and finds that it is "possible to earn a livelihood by his art" (345). What of Paul's relationship to nature, then? Paul Morel fears the natural world. Lawrence shows that when Paul is not being petrified by the "enormous orange moon" (215), or stabbing at the earth with a pointed stick in petulant agitation (259), he's surgically removing pieces of nature (in the clouds) and rearranging them in his art. The aesthetic theory which he imposes on his "lover," Miriam, resembles Stephen Dedalus's prolonged abstractions to Lynch in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*. Lawrence writes,

> He talked to her endlessly about his love of horizontals: how they, the great levels of sky and land in Lincolnshire meant to him the eternality of the will: just as the bowed Norman arches of the church, repeating themselves, meant the dogged leaping forward of the persistent human soul, on and on, nobody knows where: in contradiction to the perpendicular lines, and to the gothic arch, which, he said, leapt up at heaven and touched the ecstasy and lost itself in the divine. (215)

As an artist, Paul Morel is necessarily (and at least) once removed from nature. He does not deal in "beauty itself," but "the stuff of beauty." "Beauty itself" is that lambency to make Connie Chatterley know bodily desire. "The stuff of beauty" are those paintings of Paul Morel, or worse, his priggish exposition on the theory behind those paintings to which Miriam can only bow in consent (215). But what does Mellors being a man of nature and Paul Morel being a man of artifice have to do with the themes of love, sex and isolation in these two novels? The orientation of these characters to these themes determines the ultimate hope of the keeper, and the final dereliction of the artist. The career of Mellors is symptomatic of his integrity in a modern world frayed beyond vitality, while the career of Paul Mellors epitomizes the modern pathogen by which identity is bled dry and blown away.

Love and Sex and Body and Spirit and Life and Death

> I'm so damned spiritual with you always," [Paul] cried. [Miriam] remained silent, thinking 'Then why don't you be otherwise' . . . If he could have kissed her in abstract purity he would have done so. (*S&L*, 226)

Lawrence writes, "There are two loves: sacred and profane, spiritual and sensual" (*SICAL*, 71). The sensual/profane love that results in a "pure contact" and near fusion of the lovers, Lawrence describes as "metabolistic." This limited union stores energy, and yields fertility and clarity of vision. It is *a priori* to the individual's sense of integrity and identity. Most importantly, sensual love protects and maintains that isolation which is essential to the lives of the lovers. The spiritual/sacred love that results in a complete fusion (confusion) of the lovers, Lawrence describes as "katabolistic." This unlimited union wastes energy, and is manifested in sterility and the muddlement of personality. It begets the individual's disintegration and degenerates into and identity crisis. Spiritual love breeches isolation and death sets in.

Mellors' affair with Lady Chatterley has all the earmarks of a sensual love which, it can be read from the context of the novel, is consistent with the natural order. Oliver Mellors is the man "in the wood," the keeper of animals, a new primitive who works close to the earth in daily cycles, in synch with the sun and the seasons. He enters into his relationship with Connie cautiously (as it becomes clear later in the plot) because he is aware of the maddening aspects of a personal and nervous love from his marriage to Bertha. Mellors' personality, as he displays it to Connie, is comprised of his work and equivocated with "the wood." Their love does not flash and fade, rather it smolders and gathers itself. Their contact with each other is both pure (by Lawrence's definition) and profane (as defined by the ancillary characters and as it turned out, by most readers in 1913). But "profanity" doesn't carry a negative connotation in Lawrence's world. Profanity, as exemplified in Mellors' coupling with Lady Chatterley, is salutary and sane. Their relationship does not obliterate, but confirms the identities of its participants. When Mellors finally confesses his feeling for Connie ("Then I'll keep thee," he said. "If tha wants it, then I'll keep thee." [237]), the lady responds reflexively, naturally, without pretense:

> "Oh, you love me! You love me!" she cried, in a little cry like one of her blind, inarticulate love cries.
>
> And he realized that this was the thing he had to do, to come into tender touch, without losing his pride or his dignity or his integrity as a man . . . "I stand for the touch of bodily awareness between human beings," he said to himself, "and the touch of tenderness. And she is my mate." (237)

Even in this most intimate relationship, both mates retain their individuality and remain isolated. In Lawrence's view (could we call it "Manicheism Inverted?") the body is the natural human seat of health and sanity, while the spirit, nervous and

personal, is freakish and delusory. In *LCL*, Lawrence wins back the profane body to the light of goodness, and casts the spiritual element in the darkness of evil. The offspring of Oliver Mellors and Connie Chatterley is a harbinger of hope in a modern world that grows increasingly mad and invalid.

And then there's the triune love mess of Paul Morel. (Talk about freakish and delusory!) His abstract, disembodied love affair with Miriam Willey swings between emotional sadism and a repression that is religious. In a birthday letter to her, Paul writes, "See, you are a nun. I have given you what I would give a holy nun—as a mystic monk to a mystic nun" (292). His relationship with Clara Dawes, although passionately physical, does not secure for Paul a clearer sense of identity. "After all he was not himself, he was some attribute of hers, like the sunshine that fell on her" (351).

The greatest love of Paul's life, however, is his mother. This is taboo love is necessarily of the spiritual/sacred category and, therefore, maddening. Paul Morel seeks to solidify his identity in terms of an unnatural fusion with his mother, one that can never be consummated. The scene at the end of Chapter 8, "Strife in Love," epitomizes all the "katabolistic" qualities Lawrence warns against. Mrs Morel, equally enamored with her son as he is with her, lobbies at length against Paul's relationship with Miriam. Paul is moved by her remonstrations.

> He could not bear it. Instinctively, he realized that he was life to her. And after all she was the chief thing to him, the only supreme thing . . .
>
> "No mother–I really don't love her. I talk to her– but I want to come home to you." (252)

Paul repeatedly (and truthfully) denies his feelings for Miriam, and repeatedly confirms his love for his mother. All of it, according to Lawrence, doomed to insanity and waste.

In this pivotal chapter of *S&L*, Paul Morel winds up stroking his mother's hair while his mouth is on her throat. And the mother winds up kissing her son with "a long fervent kiss," and confessing "'My boy!' . . . in a voice trembling with passionate love" (252). Needless to say, the intrusion of Mr Morel into this scene causes an uproar on numerous levels. Morel, finding mother and son in this embrace, indicts his wife. ("'At your mischief again?' he said venomously.") This soon precipitates to a fight between the father and son which doesn't get under way in earnest because Mrs Morel faints. It's unhealthy, this spiritual love. This frenzied dance of personality is nothing if not pathological. Death sets in.

> Mr Morel slinks off to bed and Paul pathetically pleads with his mother not to sleep with her husband, but with him. Mrs Morel does not comply. Lawrence writes: "Goodnight mother."

> "Goodnight!" she said.
>
> [Paul] pressed his face upon the pillow in a fury of misery. And yet somewhere in his soul, he was at peace because still he loved his mother best. It was a bitter peace of resignation. (254)

So, what does such a katabolistic love get you at the end of the day?

Fury and misery. Frantic, impossible dreams of consummation. Resignation to a death in life. Take your pick, says Lawrence, that's what it gets you.

Bonny Solitude vs The Void

> John Thomas says good night to Lady Jane, a little droopingly, but with a hopeful heart. (*LCL*, 328)
>
> From his breast, from his mouth sprang the endless space—and it was there behind him, everywhere. (*S&L*, 464)
>
> "It's no good trying to get rid of your aloneness. You've got to stick to it all your life." (*LCL*, 129)

In the final scenes of their respective novels, both Oliver Mellors and Paul Morel are alone. But Mellors is the picture of health and hope. John Thomas might be drooping for the moment, but the promise is that he will stand tall at some definite moment in the future, when he will again enjoy the "pure contact" with Lady Chatterley. Paul Morel, however, like a stumble bum, moves through a night that promises never to relent; he moves to follow his mother who is eternally "intermingled" in death. It is this "intermingling" that makes all the difference. Mellors has always been fiercely protective of an isolation which is the first and last lesson of identity and survival in Lawrence's world. Paul Morel has sought his identity in his doomed loves for his mother (now dead) and Clara Dawes (now returned to her husband) and Miriam Willey (who has finally freed herself of his stunted development and emotional torture). And now, Paul Morel knows himself only as the empty hub of a cold empty universe. He is "infinitesimal, at the core of a nothingness, and yet nothing" (464).

Oliver Mellors has loved profanely and has a future on account of it. Paul Morel has loved spiritually and, in Lawrence's fictive vision, that is a one way ticket to nowhere. No future, no connection possible. A murderer of his own identity, that's Paul Morel. A suicide who gets no sympathy from the writer or the reader, that's Paul Morel. His first tentative steps in this modern world have taken him forever off the edge. There's no snatching him back. Let that be a lesson to you, Modern Man.

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